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Greta Garbo and Lars Hansen in the Swedish film, *The Atonement of Gosta Berling*, 1923-24.

The Film Library

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The Founding of the Film Library

It is commonly granted that the motion picture is important not only for its pervasive social effect but because it is one of the two most lively contemporary arts and the only new art-form of modern times. Unfortunately films themselves are singularly evanescent. Certain celebrated pictures enjoy a life long in comparison to the brief existence of the average screen production. Short versions of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and of *Potemkin* have been visible occasionally during the past year and *It Happened One Night* has not yet vanished totally. Generally speaking, however, a film two years old is a film which will not be seen again, and the situation is comparable to that which would be created in the world of literature if exclusively new books published within the past twelve months alone were available. Amateurs of the film and the film-makers alike are consequently confined for purposes of study to what is strictly current. There is almost no opportunity to refer back, to compare, to trace progress or retrogression. It is possible to read about the work of pioneers like the Frenchman, Georges Méliès, about the startling innovations of D. W. Griffith and of the post-war German producers: but not to see their work.

Some films have been lost and others completely destroyed. The majority of films are still preserved in various vaults, though the chemical composition of celluloid is such that it is only a question of time before the existing prints and negatives are dust and fragments. Unless something is done to restore and preserve outstanding films of the past, the motion picture from 1894 onwards will be as irrecoverably lost as the *Commedia del Arte* or the dancing of Nijinsky.

The Museum of Modern Art Film Library has been established for the purpose of collecting and preserving outstanding motion pictures of all types and of making them available to colleges and museums, thus to render possible for the first time a considered study of the film as art. At the time the Museum was founded in 1929, the Director in his preliminary report to the Trustees already envisaged for the future a department of motion pictures, and in 1932 in another report stressed the urgent need for the formation of such a department. A motion picture committee was then formed under the chairmanship of Mr. Edward M. M. Warburg, and, during the following year, carried on some preliminary investigations.

It was through the lively interest of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Mr. John Hay Whitney and Mr. Edward M. M. Warburg that concrete action finally came about. At an informal meeting last February, they discussed plans for an active department of motion pictures with the Director, and decided that a report on



D. W. Griffith directing a scene from the great film, *Intolerance*, 1916.

the work which the Museum could most usefully do in this connection should be drawn up. Mr. John E. Abbott was accordingly asked to prepare a detailed report on the operation of an active motion picture department. This work was carried out in collaboration with Miss Iris Barry, the then librarian of the Museum and co-founder in 1925 of the Film Society in London.

In preparing the report, it was fully realised that the goodwill and assistance of the film industry as a whole would be essential to the carrying out of the Museum's plans, since most of the films desirable for its collection are owned by the several members of the industry, and are only to be secured as gifts, permanent loans or rights-to-exhibit. On the technical side, the Museum was much in need of expert advice upon the complex problem of tracing old film, of restoring films that have perished chemically, of preserving them for the future, and of estimating the cost of amassing and circulating its proposed collection. From

the outset, therefore, the industry's assistance was sought and was generously forthcoming.

In substance, the report based its argument for the need for a film library on the following points:—

The art of the motion picture is the only great art peculiar to the twentieth century. Its influence in forming the taste and affecting the attitude to life of the public is well-known, but little has been done to provoke a critical or selective attitude towards the film in that part of the community readily responsive to the arts, and nothing has been done to make possible a consistent study of its content, style, history or development.

There exists a widespread demand for the means and material for studying the motion picture as art, yet the bulk of films, both domestic and foreign, which are of importance historically or aesthetically are invisible under existing circumstances, and are in serious danger of being permanently lost or destroyed by the action of time.

The purpose of the Museum of Modern Art's Film Library was therefore stated to be: to trace, catalog, assemble, exhibit and circulate to museums and colleges single films or programs of films in exactly the same manner in which the Museum traces, catalogs, exhibits and circulates paintings, sculpture, architectural photographs and models or reproductions of works of art, so that the film may be studied and enjoyed as any other one of the arts is studied and enjoyed.

The completed report, including a detailed budget for the operation of the projected department, was submitted to the Rockefeller Foundation in April. In May the President and Trustees of the Museum were informed that a conditional grant to enable the plan outlined in the report to be carried out had been approved by the Trustees of the Rockefeller Foundation. Private subscriptions, necessary to secure a portion of the grant, were generously provided by three anonymous donors.

Officers were elected as follows: President, John Hay Whitney; Vice-President and General Manager, John E. Abbott; Treasurer, Edward M. M. Warburg. Iris Barry was appointed curator. Since there was no room in the Museum building for the new department, office space was rented in the Columbia Broadcasting Building, 485 Madison Avenue, New York. On June 25th, 1935 the existence of the Film Library was made known publicly. On July 10th its first acquisitions were announced, including the first feature film, *The Great Train Robbery* of 1903. The Library's collection of books, stills and material relating to the film was begun.

After this, Miss Barry and Mr. Abbott went to Hollywood, where they succeeded in interesting the executive heads of the various film producing firms in the work of the Library and in securing assurances of their support. At the present time, films are being received constantly for the Film Library. The gift of eleven films from Mr. Harold Lloyd was followed by the gift of eleven from Warner Brothers, by two films from Mr. Samuel Goldwyn and by seven from 20th Century-Fox. Other acquisitions will be announced shortly.

Two preliminary programs of films are ready for circulation to colleges and museums in January 1936. One of these, a series of five showings of approximately two-hour duration each, under the title "A Short Survey of the Film in America, 1894-1932," will be given by the Museum of Modern Art at 8:30 p.m. on the following Tuesdays: January 7, February 4, March 3, April 7, May 5. Admission will be free to members.

A second preliminary series of films has also been prepared for circulation under the title "Some Memorable American Films, 1896-1934." Both series are available to colleges and museums at a charge of \$125 for each group of five showings. Single showings may be obtained at a charge of \$40 each. Program notes will be available with each showing, and care will be taken to suggest wherever possible the appropriate music for silent films. By the fall of 1936 four series of films, each of ten two-hour showings, will be available.

All of the series of films assembled by the Film Library will be arranged primarily to afford the student for the first time an accurate perspective of the history and aesthetic development of the motion picture since 1894. For example, in the first series the primitive American film is succeeded by the great creative work of Griffith, Ince and Sennett: but the former includes work of the pioneer Frenchman, Georges Méliès, since it exercised considerable influence on the native product.

The development of the advance guard film, of the documentary film and the animated cartoon will later be illustrated by significant examples, while especial attention will be given to those films which have conspicuously affected the fashions, the speech or the behavior of the large public. Of such are *A Fool There Was* with Theda Bara, which in 1914 introduced a new word, "vamp," to the English language; and the Irene and Vernon Castle film *The Whirl of Life*, also made in 1914, which was in considerable measure responsible for the popularity of bobbed hair, jazz bands and the dancing craze.

For the first year, the domestic film will be stressed rather than the foreign film since many of the foreign and almost none of the older domestic films of importance have of late years been available to amateurs of the cinema. Later,



Original drawing by
Méliès for costumes
in his film, *A Trip to
the Moon*, 1902.

it is planned to include the important early French and Italian films, representative Swedish films, examples from the great German period of 1919-1924 and from the U. S. S. R. contribution from 1920 onwards. The influence of the German on the American film will be shown, as will the influence of the early American film on the Russian product and the later Russian influence in turn on the American film of the past few years. The international aspect of the motion picture will be borne in mind: and the influence of the film on aesthetics as well as on society. Above all, the work of the Film Library will be first and foremost to create a consciousness of tradition and of history within the new art of the film.

Film Series 1: A Short Survey of the Film in America, 1895-1932

This series will be given by the Museum of Modern Art on January 7, February 4, March 3, April 7, and May 5, 1936

- 1. The Development of Narrative**
9 reels
Available January 1, 1936
 - c1895 Wash Day Troubles
 - c1895 The Execution of Mary Queen of Scots
 - 1902 A Trip to the Moon by Georges Méliès
 - 1903 The Great Train Robbery by Edwin S. Porter
 - c1907 Faust, a Pathé film
 - 1911 Queen Elizabeth with Sarah Bernhardt
- 2. The Rise of the American Film**
11 reels
Available February 1, 1936
 - 1912 The New York Hat by D. W. Griffith, with Mary Pickford and Lionel Barrymore
 - 1915 Between Men by Thomas H. Ince, with Wm. S. Hart
 - 1915 The Clever Dummy, a Mack Sennett comedy
 - 1914 A Fool There Was by Frank Powell, with Theda Bara
- 3. D. W. Griffith**
12 reels
Available March 1, 1936
 - 1916 Intolerance
- 4. The German Influence**
11 reels
Available April 1, 1936
 - 1928 Hands by Stella Simon
 - 1927 Sunrise by F. W. Murnau
- 5. The Talkies**
14 reels
Available May 1, 1936
 - 1926-7 Early sound experiments, with a scene from *The Jazz Singer*
 - 1927 Movietone newsreel with Mussolini, Tilden and Bernard Shaw
 - 1930 All Quiet on the Western Front by Lewis Milestone
 - 1928 Steamboat Willie by Walt Disney

For those not equipped with sound apparatus:

- 5a. The End of the Silent Era**
10 reels
Available May 1, 1936
 - 1928 Plane Crazy, the first Mickey Mouse
 - 1928 The Last Command by Josef von Sternberg

Film Series 2: Some Memorable American Films, 1896-1934

- 1. The "Western" Film**
Available January 1, 1936

 - 1903 **The Great Train Robbery** by Edwin S. Porter (1 reel)
 - 1915 **The Reformed Outlaw** with William S. Hart (2 reels)
 - 1923 **The Covered Wagon** by James Cruze (10 reels)
or 1924 **The Iron Horse** by John Ford (10 reels)
- 2. "Comedies"**
Available February 1, 1936

 - 1900 **The Doctor's Secret** by Georges Méliès (1 reel)
 - 1910 **Gertie the Dinosaur** by Winsor McCay (1 reel)
 - 1916 **His Bitter Pill**, A Mack Sennett satire (2 reels)
 - 1925 **The Freshman** with Harold Lloyd (7 reels)
or 1923 **Safety Last** with Harold Lloyd (7 reels)
 - 1927 ***The Sex Life of the Polyp** with Robert Benchley (1 reel)
 - 1929 ***The Skeleton Dance** by Walt Disney (1 reel)
- 3. Documentary Films**
Available March 1, 1936

 - 1897 **Inauguration of President McKinley** (100 feet)
 - 1934 ***Newsreel of the assassination of King Alexander of Yugoslavia** (½ reel)
 - 1925 **Grass** or 1927 **Chang**, both by Merian Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack (each 6 reels)
 - 1933 **Ultra-slow motion studies** (½ reel)
 - 1933 **The Nesting of the Sea Turtle** by Floyd Crosby (1 reel)
 - 1933 **The Great Glass Blower** by Jean Benoit-Lévy (2 reels)
- 4. Mystery and Violence**
Available April 1, 1936

 - c1911 **Tatters: A Tale of the Slums** (1 reel)
 - 1927 **Underworld** by Josef von Sternberg (8 reels)
or 1928 **The Cat and the Canary** by Paul Leni (8 reels)
or 1932 *** I Am a Fugitive from the Chain Gang** by Mervyn Le Roy (8 reels)
- 5. Screen Personalities**
Available May 1, 1936

 - 1896 **The May Irwin—John C. Rice Kiss** (50 ft.)
 - 1914 **The Whirl of Life** with Irene and Vernon Castle, part only (1 reel)
 - 1915 **The Fatal Marriage** with Wallace Reid and Lillian Gish, part only (1 reel)
 - 1924 **Monsieur Beaucaire** with Rudolph Valentino (10 reels)
or 1928 **The Last Command** with Emil Jannings (8 reels) or 1924 **Beau Brummel** with John Barrymore (10 reels)

*Films marked * need sound equipment*

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